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ABSTRACT

There is a need for the spirit of freedom in the teaching profession since in some respects the teacher's fulfillment is dependent upon the freedom that the teacher is willing and able to exercise in his/her profession. Teaching freedom means the opportunity to develop the potential for teaching excellence according to the teacher's individuality in dealing with the individual differences among the students. Many teaching institutions have generated robots, programed to follow precise directions for every aspect of educational programs with no individual thinking or judgment. Rigid, prescribed programs cannot exist where teachers understand and respect their freedom, and the persistent companion of freedom is responsibility. The teacher must see his acceptance of freedom in the light of the much larger dimension of human understanding. The competent professional soon realizes the fallibility of highly prescriptive programs for all students in a given class or grade level. He needs the freedom to design and deal with content toward the maximum individual development of each student. If the teacher is willing to give up this freedom and responsibility of decisionmaking, he should be aware of what he accepts in its place. (MF)

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Freedom, Professionalism and Our National Heritage

Donald Maley

It is significant that this "Crossroads '76" conference of the American Industrial Arts Association is being held on the eve of this Nation's two hundredth birthday. And, perhaps as we join with millions of people across this great Nation in the Bicentennial Celebration, we will renew our perspectives about the basic and fundamental principles that were the seeds of the

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national harvest that blossomed forth on that Fourth Day of July, 1776. Foremost among those principles that undergirded the fabric of thought and deed on that historic day was that of "Freedom". Here some two centuries later the Industrial Arts Profession has appropriately set about to celebrate our Nation's birthday as a way of telling ourselves, our neighbors, and the whole world that we have endured two hundred years. But it is the ideal of freedom that merits our celebration, and how newer and broader dimensions of human freedom have evolved through the years. Yes, as the acorns give birth to mighty oaks that grow bigger and stronger with the years, so too have the seeds of freedom of the New England patriots and a Virginia planter provided us with a growth and heritage that merits a birthday not just in 1976, but in every day and year to come.

Think if you will if this nation some 200 years ago had lost the vision of humanitarianism, individual freedom, justice, and the principles of democratic government; and think if you will what the world might have been like today if without the above vision and spirit of mind this nation had become a dictatorship or some other form of authoritarian state.

There is a wonderful old American standard that contains these words:

> Oh beautiful for spacious skies,
> For amber waves of grain,
> For purple mountain majesties --
> Above the fruited plain!
> America! America!
> God shed His grace on thee,...

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Please be reminded my friends and esteemed colleagues, that the gifts were not just mountains of majesty, waves of golden grain or endless fruited plain.

The greatest of all gifts was that undying spirit of our founders that we would start with freedom and we would use our great natural resources and human talent to develop a nation that would one day be copied and depended upon so heavily by nearly every nation and governmental unit in the world. Yes, we have spread our wealth, our generosity, our resources, our technology, our manpower, and our idealism. But we also have spread our spirit of freedom and our context of democracy to all corners of the globe. And, it is freedom that I want to dwell upon in the next few minutes. Freedom is not just a matter of being able to vote on election day, or the rights of a free press, although they are important. Freedom must extend into every nook and cranny of our daily existence, just as the nervous system in our bodies extends to every dimension and every extremity of our physical being.

As a teacher, you too must be concerned with freedom, for it is only by the exercise of freedom that the teaching profession can exist and ever hope to carry out its awesome task that was laid out for it some two hundred years ago.

The publication Goals for Americans contains in its introduction the following statement. (4, p.1) "The paramount goal of the United States was set forth long ago. It is to guard the rights of the individual to ensure his development, and to enlarge his opportunity."

As contemporary as these ideals may seem, they can be found set forth in the Declaration of Independence as adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.

John W. Gardner in his discussion of "National Goals in Education" has stated: (4, p.81)

> ... Our deepest convictions impel us to foster individual fulfillment. We wish each one to achieve the promise that is in him. We wish each one to be worthy of a free society, and capable of strengthening a free society.
>
> Education is essential not only to individual fulfillment but to the vitality of our national life.

This is an enormous task and it is one that will require the best from our educational agencies no matter where they are found.

The concept of "fulfillment" is based upon the recognition of -- and attention to -- the important idea of "individuality" in its many and diverse forms.

The thesis of my discussion at this point is that the teacher's fulfillment is dependent upon the freedom that he or she is willing and able to exercise in the pursuit of the tasks of a professional educator. And, likewise, the mere attempt at achieving the previously stated goal set forth in the Declaration of Independence that of guarding the right of each individual to pursue fulfillment and to enlarge his opportunity will require levels and degrees of freedom on the part of the teacher that will permit the exercise of professional judgment, as well as a diversity of program, experiences, and procedures

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to cope with the educational needs of this nation's people young and old.

> The history of American education is the long, turbulent record of a nation that wasn't afraid to risk failure or trouble or confusion in pursuit of a goal that at first seemed widely impractical: to give every American child a chance to develop to the limit of his ability. It is still one of the most radical ideas in human history, yet it grew out of the American soil as naturally as wheat or corn. (2, p.67)

I ask that you look upon your freedom as a teacher as an opportunity -- an opportunity to develop the potential for teaching excellence that may exist within each of you. Just as we must recognize and deal with the great multitude of differences and factors of individuality that exists within our students. Each teacher in his or her own right is a composite of individuality consisting of strengths and weaknesses, as well as emotional, intellectual and philosophical differences.

There is no single mold for casting our teachers just as there is no single teaching style, process, or program that is suited to all teachers or students.

We have not generated teachers in many of our institutions. We have generated robots who want to be turned on or off by principals, supervisors, courses of study or programs that permit no thinking or judgment.

Some while ago, a publisher asked me to review a manuscript from a professor in a certain teacher education institution. This manuscript contained a teacher's manual as well as a

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student's manual. The teacher's manual and supporting materials contained precise questions to be asked of the students as if the teacher could not think for him or herself. The teacher's materials contained specific directions for doing just about everything in the conduct of the program. It contained precise listings of supplies and materials to be used so one could buy such items in kits for each student or experience. This is surely one way to build rigidity into a program and decrease the freedom of both teacher and student. The student's manual was just as disrespectful in its dealing with the learner's abilities, for it even listed questions that they (the students) should ask the teacher. Think if you will, what kind of a nation we will build if our teachers are content to be slaves to a prescriptive program that defines their every action, and far worse, think of the kind of a nation we will build if we tell the learner the precise questions he/she should ask.

Yet my friends, there are teachers and administrators of teachers who seem to want just that kind of program. As I search for the logic behind such actions I am told that we need programs that are teacher proof. Elliot W. Eisner in his text Confronting Curriculum Reform, addresses this "teacher proof" logic head on, in the following comment.

> If one thing has been learned during the past fifteen years, it is that the so-called ideal of "teacher-proof" curriculum is a mirage subscribed to by those who have little contact with the subtleties of the classroom. (1, p.7)

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The free and open spirit of a freedom-loving people would soon be lost if such naive and thoughtless concoctions of professional inferiority were permitted to grow and prosper. However, I am fully confident the patrons of our schools in the exercise of their freedom will smoke out this insidious cancer that has found its way into our educational practices.

However, it is the profession that should be the watchdog of its operations, and up to this point it has seen fit to look the other way. If we depend upon the patrons of our schools to do the monitoring and dealing with such programmatical elements of teacher function the consequences might put the profession in an entirely different position than it would want.

The mechanistic character of certain educational programs currently in use do not encourage the concept of teacher individuality nor that of teacher freedom. In its place such programs tend to promote uniformity and conformance. As teachers we need to read and re-read that great classic on education that was written by Harold Benjamin titled The Cultivation of Idiosyncracy. For, my friends, it is not through the attempt at uniformity or conformity that excellence in teaching for each of us will be achieved. Your principal assets in your quest for teaching excellence, as well as excellence in your contribution to the profession, will be found in your idiosyncracies and I ask you to exploit them just as a great baseball pitcher exploits his unique pitches to deal with the batters he faces.

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Freedom for the teacher in this society is not luxury to enjoy or to relish for its own sake. And, furthermore, freedom for the teacher does not mean that you and I can do as we darned well please. All freedom exists within boundaries, and certainly the freedom of the teacher is no exception. The great and grave responsibility that is yours as a teacher brings with it boundaries and restraints to freedom that take on many and diverse forms such as -- professional ethics, confidentiality of information, the requirement of dependability, ethical behavior, and the pursuit of societal established goals.

But the freedom to make decisions regarding the instructional needs of the learner, and the freedom to make decisons, about methods, strategies, rate, pace, and variations in content commensurate with the needs of the learner are important professional freedoms that should rest with the teacher. And yet we find hosts of teachers who chose not to accept these freedoms and are willing to follow pre-packaged educational strategies and dictum in which they have not had one iota of input or any form of decision making.

> One of the clearest dangers in modern society is that men and women will lose the experience of participating in meaningful decisions concerning their own life and work, that they will become cogs in the machine because they feel like cogs in the machine. All too often today they are inert components of the group, not participating in any significant way but simply being carried along like grains of sand in a bucket. (3, p.59)

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Freedom is a requirement that must be felt and exercised in the execution of one's professional responsibilities as a teacher in a free society where individual fulfillment is a goal of the educational process. Rigid, dictated, and lock-step-prescribed programs cannot exist where teachers understand and respect their freedom just as those New England patriots understood and respected their freedom against tyranny some two hundred years ago.

As teachers and leaders in the Industrial Arts Profession, I hope, and pray that you will be filled with the vision, the vigor, and the enthusiasm --- that there are things <u>you</u> want to do; --- that there are ideas <u>you</u> want to test and apply, --- and that there are principles and procedures that <u>you</u> want to challenge and evaluate in the cauldron of education for a freedom-loving people. And likewise, I hope and pray there is not one among you who would give up your opportunity for freedom as a professional for something that is easier, cut and dried, and routinized by the clock and day.

> Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants. We are stuffing their heads with the products of earlier innovation rather than teaching them how to innovate. We think of the mind as a storehouse to be filled rather than as an instrument to be used. (2, p.68)

I also want to remind you that freedom never walks alone in any effective society, social order, or governmental unit. It has a constant companion that each of us must adopt if we

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are to share the privilege of freedom in any way that freedom will prosper and endure. That persistent companion of freedom is responsibility -- responsibility to carry your share of the burden of government, of the profession, of the functioning of the home, school, or society wherein you enjoy the fruits of a free person.

> ... In short, it is necessary to examine the capacity of the individual to accept the responsibility of freedom and the conditions under which he will sacrifice his freedom to gain other objectives.... (3, p.90)

If we ignore the responsibilities that must be shared in a free society, we will surely lose our freedom, for freedom without responsibility soon degenerates into anarchy. This is a point that each of us must understand and it is an issue that will demand more and more consideration as we double our population, as we move into an urban society, and as the impact of our individual actions have an influence on increasing numbers of people. The freedoms and accompanying responsibilities of Robinson Caruso on that lonely island were of one dimension, but those of us who live in Twentieth Century America have an entirely different dimension of involvement with both freedom and responsibility.

It is important that the teacher see his/her acceptance of freedom in light of the much wider sphere of human interaction that extends to each and every student and to the limits of their bounds of activity. The ingredients of purpose and commitment to the ideals of personal freedom interacting with

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the complex goals of the larger affected dimension of lives and their fulfillment become the substance of meaning for the teacher.

> ... But each kind of meaning implies a relationship between the person and some larger system of ideas or values, a relationship involving obligations as well as rewards. In the individual life, meaning, purpose and commitment are inseparable. When a man succeeds in the search for identity he has found the answer not only to the question "Who am I?" but to a lot of other questions too: "What must I live up to? What are my obligations? To what must I commit myself? (3, p.103)

And my young friends of The American Industrial Arts Association I hope that you too have taken a page out of the books of our founding fathers. I hope that as you teach you will relish the freedom that a great teacher needs and desires in order to cope with the many and diverse challenges of education in a complex, dynamic, and free society.

You have learned of the great variations that exist among individuals, with respect to their giftedness, interests, ambitions, motivations, physical and mental abilities, backgrounds, securities, insecurities, and a host of other factors that contribute to making up each person. And for those of you who have not taught in our public schools, you will come face-to-face with that reality when you do go out to teach. It is at that time when the sincere and competent professional teacher will realize the fallability of highly prescriptive programs for all students in a given class or grade level.

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It is at this point where you will need the freedom to be yourself -- the freedom to design, to contrive, and to innovate with instructional procedures, -- and the freedom to deal with the content so that maximum individual development of each student may be attempted.

If the teacher is willing to give up the freedom of decision-making in his conduct of the teaching process, he must also be cognizant of what he accepts in its place. Otherwise, he might find himself in the same position of the hordes that enslaved themselves to the dictates of Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin.

As a public school educator you must examine the value and effectiveness of the alternative to professional freedom with respect to accomplishing the mission of public educaton in these United States. You must examine the alternative in terms of its consistency with the best that is known in the areas of learning theory and pedagogical practice. You must examine the alternative with respect to its recognition of -- and attention to -- the concepts of individual differences and the pursuit of educational practices that strengthen such individuality. You must above all examine the alternative to freedom on the part of the teacher, with respect to what vested interests are served by the alternative.

The issue of freedom takes on two important dimensions. There is the freedom that the teacher takes upon him/her-self whether that be one of an analytical-creative problem-solving individual, or that of a conformist to a lock-step program.

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The other important dimension goes beyond the self and extends to his or her responsibility to the students and the society in which the teacher functions.

> A meaningful relationship between the self and values that lie beyond the self is not incompatible with individual freedom. On the contrary, it is an essential ingredient of the inner strength that must characterize the free man. The man who has established emotional, moral and spiritual ties beyond the self gains the strength needed to endure the rigors of freedom... (3, p.93)

Thus my friends, in examining the logic behind one's willingness to give up the freedom of professional initiative, decision-making, ordering, and structuring in favor of that which is easier; that which requires a minimum of planning, ordering, or structuring; it is quite apparent that the "self" is what is being served and that beyond the self may well be neglected.

Also, it is possible that a much closer examination must be made of our teacher education processes as well as of those who are permitted to enter into the profession in a free society.

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